Is a Webcast a good choice for my meeting?

What is a Webcast – Webcasting a meeting or event offers an excellent opportunity to share your presentation through a computer or smart phone, with a much wider audience who is unable to attend in person. The archive of your webcast makes it possible to replay the meeting "on-demand" at a later date. Webcasting is a "one-to-many" medium and is not directly interactive, but it can be an important component towards more open government.

Why, When, and How – If you feel there is an audience for your meeting or event that may not be able to attend your meeting in person or would benefit from an "on-demand" archive of the meeting, a webcast can add out-reach value to your presentation.

Not all meetings or presentations play well in a webcast environment to computers or smart-phones. For instance, if your location or audience has limited access to a high speed computer network, or you want to be directly interactive with your audience, a webcast may not be the best answer.

However, nothing is more frustrating than a webcast that disconnects, buffers, or has poor quality audio or video. A technically sound webcast includes four important considerations. 1) A meeting room sound system with enough quality microphones to clearly hear all participants of the meeting, 2) a quality webcast system connected to a quality computer network connection for a reliable audio stream, 3) a webcast system that accommodates many simultaneous webcast users, and 4) an easily accessible web page link for users to listen live and/or gain easy access a meeting archive later on.

Audio or Audio/Video – An audio webcast requires far less equipment and bandwidth requirements to send, receive, or archive. What value will video add to the viewer? If your only answer is to see the people who are talking, consider the audio-only option. Audio only is easier to creative, send, and archive. Slides and other meeting information can be made available as an attachment before or as a resource after the meeting is archived. Guests should identify themselves as they begin to speak. It is a practice that helps the listener and adds a level or decorum and order to a webcast meeting. If you use video, get close-ups for clarity for the small screens users will see. Note that slide presentations are often difficult to see clearly in a webcast camera shot.

The Value of an Archive – The value of a meeting archive CAN NOT BE OVER STATED. In almost every case, there will be many times more uses of an archive meeting than live connections. An archive gives you opportunity to replay the event and double check information or recommend it to others who may not have known about the meeting when it was presented. ALAWYS plan for an archive. It can easily be deleted at a later date … but may be impossible recreate after the fact.

Best Practices and Tips:

Your webcast system may work perfectly, but if you do not make it easy and convenient for your webcast audience to follow along, the webcast meeting may not be well received…

Interactive meeting: In advance of your webcast, consider posting meeting documents, handout materials, or power-point slides in the web space you routinely communicate with the public. It is often easy for a webcast attendee to open a second screen. Consider posting an email link that you can monitor during your webcast and allow users to email questions and comments. Refer to the link regularly during the webcast and encourage the webcast audience to use it.

Identify the speakers/participants – For the benefit of webcast listeners, speakers should be recognized or identify themselves as they begin to speak. Consider the format of a Legislative meeting ... the chairman always calls on the members by name. The procedure is a matter of decorum, but it also makes the speaker clearly identifiable to the webcast listener.

Talk to the webcast audience – In the same way that you personalize your presentation to the audience in the room, consider doing the same for the webcast audience … "and for those of you joining via the webcast, refer to the attachments/send email questions to/contact us after the meeting at…"

Posting an agenda in advance and reposting the agenda for the archive and reference times – An agenda will help any audience follow along, in person or in the webcast audience. In the case of a webcast archive, consider reposting your agenda with a "time-reference" for each agenda item. If you re-post your agenda with a webcast archive, you will be able to note that "item 3 starts at: 15 minutes into the meeting; item 4 at: 20 minutes and so forth. This adds value to the webcast archive user.

Private or public access – Be aware that ANY webcast event is available to the public at some level. There are no PRIVATE Webcasts except for special security arrangements. A good rule-of-thumb is that every microphone is always on. If it is a public meeting, publicize your meeting at least a week in advance through email, press release, or other sources where you routinely communicate with the public. Include a start time, agenda, and a link to the webcast page or menu. Send a follow up reminder the day of or day before the event. Also consider posting times of up-coming events and include links to archived meetings.